

E1-6977

## Other Submissions

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Please fill out the following information to help us complete your filing:

Docket #:

- -

Subject: \* STB Finance Docket # 35095

First Name: \* Mary

Middle Name:

Last Name: \* Anderson

Address: \* PO Box 870854

City: \* Wasilla

State: \* AK

Zip Code: \* 99687-

Email Address: \* marya@mtaonline.net

Group/Affiliation: Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board

Message: To Mr. David Navecky,

I have attached copies of the Mat Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board comments on AK Railroad Corp. proposed alternatives for the Port MacKenzie Rail project.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Rec'd.  
3-24-08

# Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board

HC 32 Box 6706, Wasilla, Alaska 99654  
(907) 745-3975 Fax (907) 745-0938

Mr. David Navecky  
STB Finance Docket No. 35095  
Surface Transportation Board  
395 E. Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20423

RE: Comment to Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project

Dear Mr. Navecky,

The Mat-Su State Park Citizen's Advisory Board wishes to respond regarding the proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Project. The Board has a special interest in this project because one of the proposed corridors is within and adjacent to the Willow Creek and Nancy Lake State Recreation Areas (SRA) and the West Gateway Trail System, a popular winter recreation area.

The Mat-Su State Park Citizen's Advisory Board feels the Willow Corridor (Corridor 3), as described in the 2003 Rail Corridor Study and in the more recent project map is incompatible with the mission of State Parks and Outdoor Recreation, especially when there are viable alternatives. Our Board has voted unanimously to oppose such an action. Corridor 3 would disrupt existing trail systems, surround Nancy Lakes SRA with railroad activity on its east and west boundaries, divide Willow Creek SRA, and needlessly destroy the peaceful character of a prime natural recreation area bounded by the Parks highway and the Susitna River.

There are few places in Alaska or the United States like Willow where such a wealth of recreational opportunities exist so close to an urban area. This recreation is uniquely Alaskan: snow-machining, dog mushing, skiing, skijoring, hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking and ATV riding over miles of open area. Additionally, there are maintained trails and parks. A 2004 survey by Willow 2020 and the Mat-Su Borough found that over 90% of respondents chose Willow as the place to live and recreate because of the open country, beauty and quiet ([www.waco-ak.org](http://www.waco-ak.org)). While the full time resident population of Willow is small, on weekends the actual population is multiplied many times by south central Alaska residents enjoying second homes and cabins - drawn by the recreational activities.

## Board Members

Mary Anderson, Chair  
Roy Wahl  
William Royce  
Glenn Goodman, Vice-Chair  
William Fitzgerald

Ralph Baldwin  
Garret (Gary) Brown  
Shelis Jorgensen  
John Strassenburgh, Vice-Chair  
Bruce Brockett (1st Alternate)

Steve Charles  
Charles Leet  
Darin Markwardt  
Howard Carbone

The 2003 Rail Corridor Study by Tryck Nyman Hayes, Inc., vastly understates the importance of recreation in the study area, barely mentions two very popular State Recreation Areas and does not address any mitigation measures for the impacts from the rail line. For example, it states on p. 49, "The project [Corridor 3] would be expected to have some direct impacts on recreation, especially trail use and limiting access to recreation sites particularly if mitigation measures such as below and above ground crossings over trails for example are not utilized".

Premier recreational areas affected by corridor include:

### **Willow Creek State Recreation Area**

Home to internationally renowned salmon and trout fishing, Corridor 3 would be the second railroad line to cross Willow Creek within a few river miles and would bisect the recreation area. There are no possible mitigation measures for "surround sound" trains. The proposed railroad line would cross Willow Creek, a recognized RS2477 trail, Lucky Shot Trail and the main road to the SRA, all within a half mile. This scar would open up and expose the heart of the State Recreation Area.

Corridor 3 would also bring safety issues such as visitors walking on and fishing from the railroad trestle. Recently, a child was killed by a train after fishing from the tracks.

### **Nancy Lake State Recreation Area**

This popular recreation area would be impacted by the rail line running adjacent to its western boundary and would have similar recreational compromises as those in the Willow Creek SRA. Alaska residents and out of state visitors come to Nancy Lakes SRA in the summer and fall to enjoy peaceful canoe trips through dozens of lakes. If Corridor 3 is utilized, this chain of 130 lakes and ponds would be bound by railroads immediately to the east and to the west of the park. The 2003 study states the rail line would follow the lateral moraine adjacent to Red Shirt Lake which would bring it very close to recreational cabins. In contrast, the borough public notice places the rail line in the Big Swamp wetlands. Either option is bad news for resource and recreational protection. It is poor public policy to establish a railroad corridor west of the park. It is particularly troubling when a shorter route exists which would join the existing line south of Houston.

### **West Gateway Trail System**

Working together over many years, the Willow community, including snowmachiners, mushers, and skiers, has created a premier winter recreational area with one hundred miles of groomed and community maintained trails. All the trails have easements, are included in the Mat Su Trails Plan and are considered "regionally significant." Any given winter weekend will see hundreds of trail users exploring this semi-wilderness area that boasts open views of Denali, the Talkeetnas, and the Chugach Range. A railroad bisecting the Willow and Big Swamps will ruin this Alaskan experience.

The West Gateway Trails support many international and regional races including the Iditarod Restart, Klondike 300, Don Bowers 300 and Junior Iditarod sled dog races, as well as the Klondike 400 and Aurora 200 snowmachine races. Since much of the area is wetlands, trail crossings over the proposed railway would be many and expensive. Thus, these races would have to find other venues. These same trails support a vital training for such Iditarod teams as those of Martin Buser, Dee Dee Jonrowe and many others.

Tourism and recreation in our state are dependent on maintaining accessible natural country. The strip of land north of the Little Su and west of the Parks Highway is an example of accessible and quality wilderness adventure done right. The proposed Willow to Port McKenzie Railroad Corridor would destroy the visions and dreams and hard work by many to develop a prime recreation area now enjoyed on any given weekend by hundreds of Alaskans and visitors from all over the world. There are other viable alternatives for a Port MacKenzie rail extension such as the Houston North and South and Big Lake routes that would have less impact on important recreational areas. The Mat-Su State Parks Citizen's Advisory Board recommends that the Borough eliminate Willow Corridor #3 from consideration for the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Project and, instead, consider a route in an area that would benefit from, rather than, be hurt by railroad development.

Sincerely,

*Mary Anderson*

Mary Anderson, chair  
Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board

# Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board

HC 32 Box 6706, Wasilla, Alaska 99654  
(907) 745-3975 Fax (907) 745-0938

February 23, 2007

Brad Sworts  
Matanuska Susitna Borough  
Planning Department  
350 E. Dahlia Ave.  
Palmer, AK 99645

RE: Public Notice MSB004842; the Willow to Pt. McKenzie Railroad Corridor

Dear Mr. Sworts,

The Mat-Su State Park Citizen's Advisory Board wishes to respond to MSB Public Notice MSB004842 regarding the Willow to Pt. McKenzie Railroad Corridor Easement. The Board has a special interest in this corridor because of the direct impact to the Willow Creek and Nancy Lake State Recreation Areas and the West Gateway Trail System, a popular winter recreation area.

Because the board felt this railroad location is incompatible with the mission of State Parks and Outdoor Recreation, when there are viable alternatives, the Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board voted unanimously to oppose the acquisition of easements for corridor three. The proposed railroad corridor 3 would disrupt existing trail systems, surround Nancy Lakes SRA with railroad activity on its east and west boundaries, divide Willow Creek SRA, and needlessly destroy the peaceful character of a prime natural recreation area bounded by the Parks highway and the Susitna River.

There are few places in Alaska or the United States where there is such a wealth of recreational opportunities so close to an urban area as there are in Willow. It is uniquely Alaskan recreation: snowmachining, dog mushing, skiing and skijoring, hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking and ATV riding over miles of open areas, maintained trails and parks. A 2004 survey by Willow 2020 and the Mat-Su Borough found that over 90% of respondents chose Willow as the place to live and recreate because of the open country, beauty and quiet. (The survey can be seen at [www.waco-ak.org](http://www.waco-ak.org)). While the full time resident population of Willow is small, on many weekends the actual population is multiplied many times by south central residents enjoying second homes and cabins - drawn by the recreational activities.

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Howard Carbone  
Bruce Brockett (2<sup>nd</sup> Alternate)

The 2003 Rail Corridor Study by Tryck Nyman Hayes, Inc. vastly understated the importance of such recreation in the study area, barely mentions two very popular state recreation areas and does not address any mitigation measures for the damage or impacts from the rail line. For example it states on p. 49, "The project [Corridor 3] would be expected to have some direct impacts on recreation, especially trail use and limiting access to recreation sites particularly if mitigation measures such as below and above ground crossings over trails for example are not utilized".

Premier recreational areas affected by corridor include:

### **Willow Creek State Recreation Area**

Home to international renowned salmon and trout fishing, corridor three will be the second railroad line to cross Willow Creek within a few river miles and will bisect the recreation area. There are no possible mitigation measures for "surround sound" trains. The railroad line will cross Willow Creek, a recognized RS2477 trail, Lucky Shot Trail and the main road to the SRA, all within a half mile. This scar will open up and expose the heart of the SRA.

It will also safety bring issues as this area already has problems with visitors walking on and fishing from the existing railroad trestle. Recently, a child was killed by a train after fishing from the tracks.

### **Nancy Lake State Recreation Area**

This popular recreation will be impacted by the rail line running adjacent to its western boundary and will have similar recreational compromises as those in the Willow Creek SRA. Alaska residents and out of state visitors come to Nancy Lakes SRA in the summer and fall to enjoy peaceful canoe trips through dozens of lakes. If corridor 3 is utilized this chain of 130 lakes and ponds will be bound by railroads immediately to the east and to the west of the park. The 2003 study states the rail line will follow the lateral moraine adjacent to Red Shirt Lake which will bring it very close to recreational cabins. In contrast, the borough public notice places the rail line in the Big Swamp wetlands. Either option is bad news for resource and recreational protection. It is poor public policy to establish a railroad corridor west of the park. It is particularly troubling when a shorter route exists which would join the existing line south of Houston.

### **West Gateway Trail System**

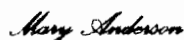
Working together over many years the Willow community, snowmachiners, mushers, and skiers have created a premier winter recreational area with one hundred miles of groomed and community maintained trails. All the trails have easements, are included in the Mat Su Trails Plan and are considered "regionally significant." Any given winter weekend will see hundreds of trail users exploring this semi wilderness area which boasts open views of Denali, the Talkeetnas, and the Chugach Range. A railroad bisecting the Willow and Big Swamps will ruin this Alaskan experience.

The West Gateway Trails support many international and regional races including the Iditarod Restart, Klondike 300, Don Bowers 300 and the Junior Iditarod sled dog races and the Klondike 400 and Aurora 200 snowmachine races. Since much of the area is wetlands, trail/rail crossings will be few and expensive, thus these races will find other venues. These same trails support a vital training for such Iditarod teams as from Martin Buser, Dee Dee Jonrowe and many others.

There are other viable alternatives for a Pt. MacKenzie rail corridor that need to be researched in more detail that was done in the 2003 study. Corridors four and five will have less impact on important recreational areas. Before easements are acquired more research needs to be done on costs and social/economic impacts rather than assumptions and unrepresentative public comment.

Tourism and recreation in our state are dependent on maintaining accessible natural country. The strip of land north of the Little Su and west of the Parks Highway is an example of accessible wilderness quality adventure done right. The proposed Willow to Pt. McKenzie Railroad Corridor will destroy the visions and dreams and hard work now enjoyed on any given weekend by hundreds of visitors. The Mat-Su State Parks Citizen's Advisory Board recommends for the borough research other options before acquiring easements on corridor three.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Anderson".

Mary Anderson, chair  
Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board